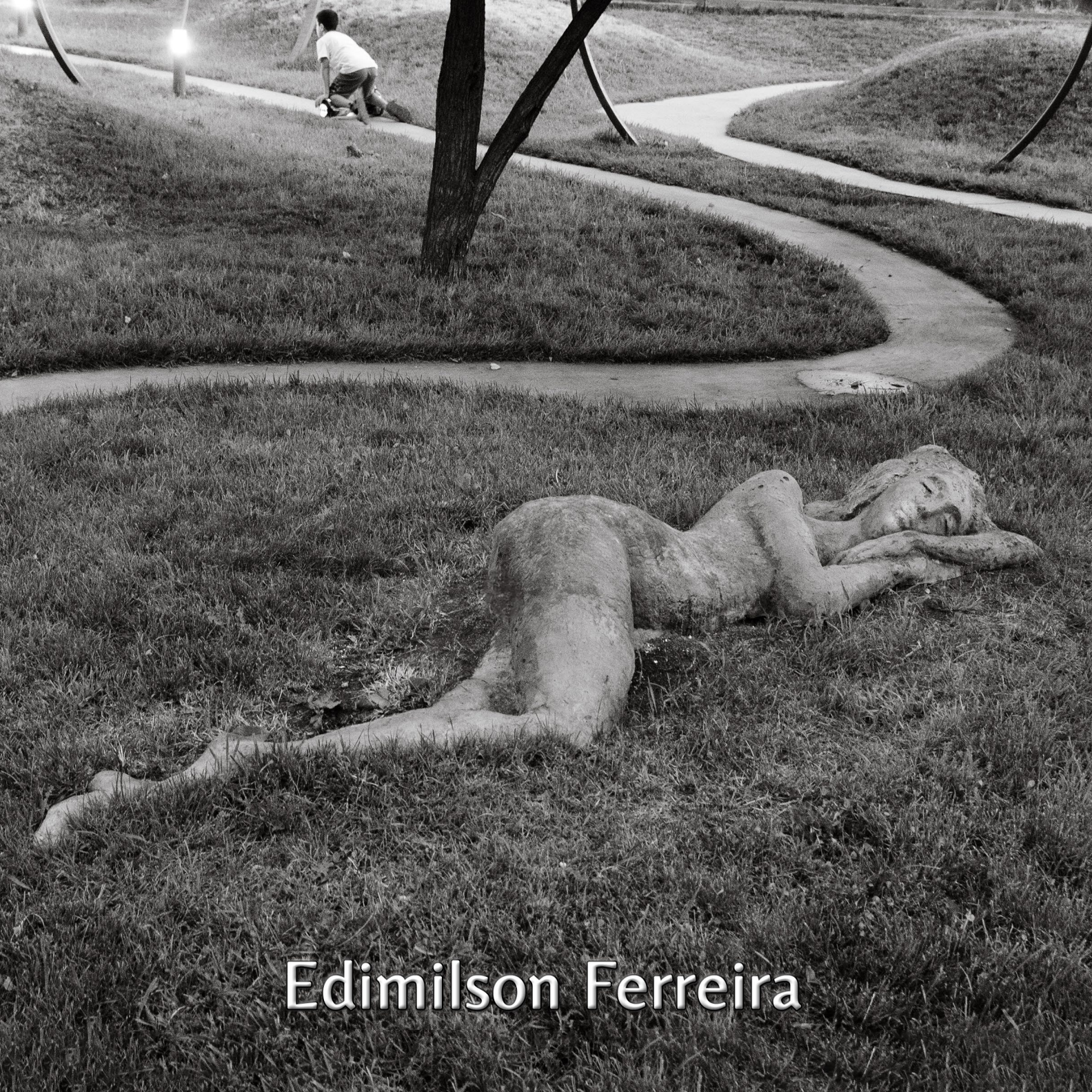




Edimilson Ferreira



Cover: *Dreaming* @Edimilson Ferreira

Born in 1972 in a poor and dangerous neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro, photographer Edimilson Ferreira defies easy categorization. By his own admission, luck shaped his trajectory from the start — being the youngest of four children meant his older siblings could support his education, making him the first in his family to earn a university degree. That same fortunate timing would later carry him from Brazil to Berlin on a Goethe Institut scholarship, where a chance encounter with a Russian woman set him on a wandering path through Germany, Georgia, and eventually Armenia, where he now lives and works.

A voracious self-taught student, he immersed himself in work of the masters — Cartier-Bresson, Vivian Maier, Ansel Adams — training his eye for moments when opportunity and preparation meet. He prefers analog to digital and shoots with an older Nikon camera and minimal post-processing. He maintains that the camera is no more responsible for a great image than a stove is for a great meal.

His street photography is defined by the collision of chance and compositional rigor: the right light, the right shadow, the right stranger passing through the frame at precisely the right moment. As Cartier-Bresson once said, and as Edimilson Ferreira wholeheartedly agrees — luck plays a part, each and every time.



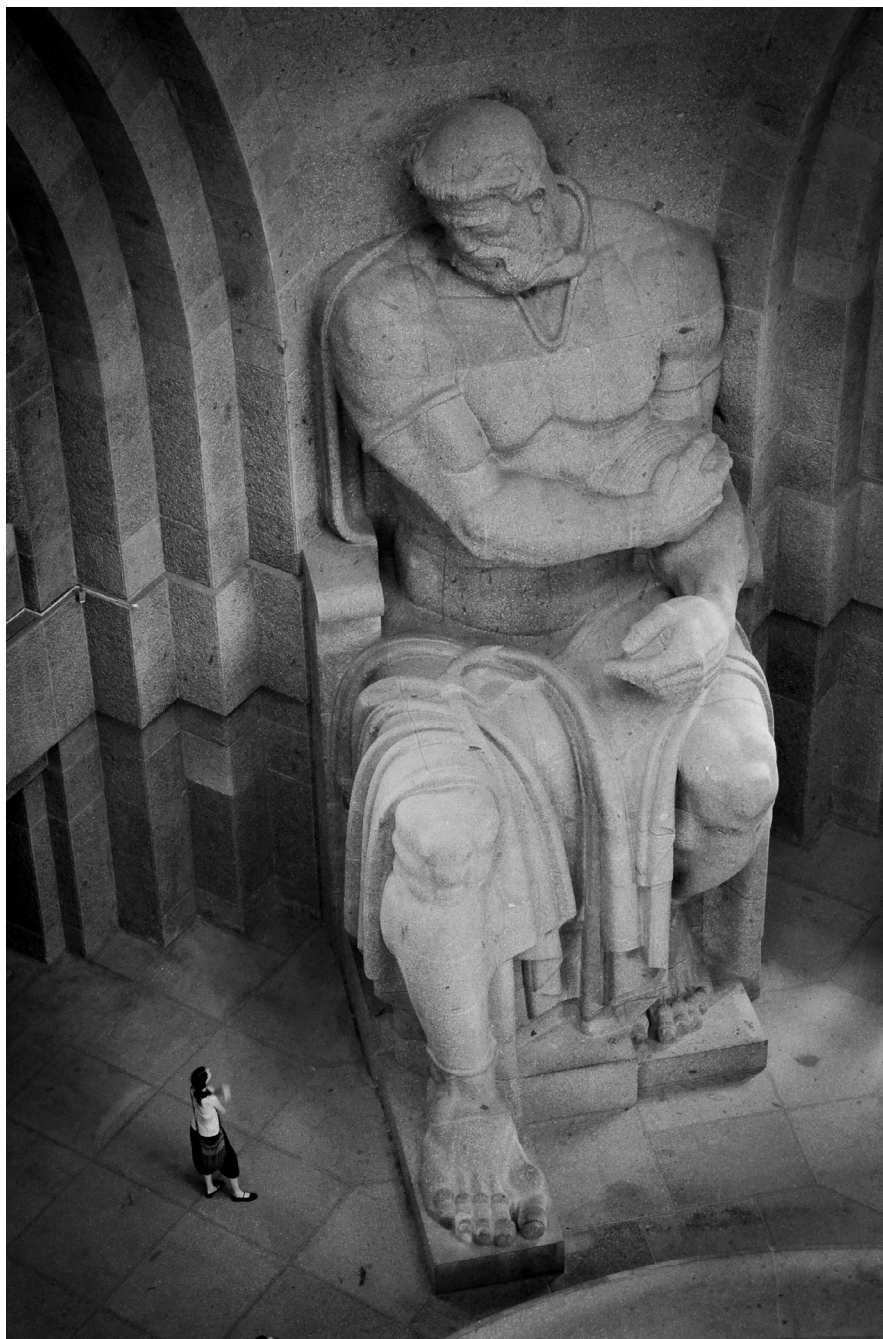
Taken using a digital camera. I was in Berlin, in the Alexanderplatz metro station. It was a hot summer day, and the station was crowded. I spotted these two figures sitting and immediately noticed how curiously symmetrical they looked. I tried taking the photo with my film camera, but the light was not good. Luckily I was able shoot them using my digital camera. After just a few seconds they had gotten up from the bench and the moment was gone forever.

A Life Together



I took this picture on an impulse, not really knowing why I was doing it. I was waiting for a bus somewhere in France, returning from a trip. To be frank, I still can't explain why the scene caught my eye, but I do know that photographing shadows is something I had wanted to do for a long time before capturing this scene. I think I wanted to have a kind of self-portrait like some of Vivian Maier's. Many of them are just brilliant.

Yours Truly (film)



I took this picture in Leipzig, Germany, inside a tourist attraction called “Monument to the Battle of the Nations.” The young woman and the giant statue seem to be looking at each other, and I deliberately waited at that spot until I could capture the scene I had imagined. Luckily, no one else was standing near the two figures when I took the shot, so the photo only shows the elements that matter, without any distractions.

Giant (digital)



I took this one at Prague Castle, in the capital of the Czech Republic. The interplay of lines and shapes of the architecture is visually interesting in itself, of course, but the figure with the umbrella adds a dynamic element to what would otherwise be an image made up exclusively of static elements.

Umbrella (film)



I took this photo in Tbilisi, in the country of Georgia, in 2018. I was standing right in front of a curious sculpture in the street which was next to a park called Mtatsminda. If I remember correctly, I had this picture on my computer hard drive for years until I realized last year what an interesting image it is. Until then, I couldn't at all remember that I had taken this photo. It was only after converting the digital color capture into a black-and-white image that it became really special to me. Although it is an interesting and surreal image in color as well, I tend to prefer the black-and-white version. There is something to be learned here about how an image can change when it is converted into monochrome. This effect is sometimes easier and sometimes harder to predict. Images composed mostly of geometrical shapes often gain from being converted or shot originally in black-and-white. For more complex scenes, such as the one depicted in this image, one generally cannot predict exactly how the conversion will affect the image.

Three Holes and Fog (digital)



Also taken in Berlin. This curious juxtaposition of elements can't be seen anymore. Nowadays this place certainly looks very different. This is one of the things that most fascinate me about street photography. More often than not, street photos capture moments in time that will never repeat themselves, which as a rule makes each photo unique. By the way, the guy up the ladder is not a real person, but a dummy.

Bikini (film)



Behind this image there is an almost unbelievable story. I took it in Magdeburg, Germany, where I lived for some years. I had been riding my bike earlier the same day and had seen an advertisement like the one in the picture somewhere else in the city. When looking at the advertisement in the morning, I thought to myself that I might have an interesting photo opportunity if there were also a cat in the scene. Hours later, again riding my bike, but in another part of the city, I was amazed to see the same advertisement, but now with a cat in the background. I have always wondered what are the odds of something like this happening.

Circus (film)



I took this picture (among others in this series) in Erfurt, Germany, at the spot where a circus was being dismantled. A trapezium (plural, "trapezia") is "a quadrilateral having no parallel sides." If you look closely at this image, you will find at least seven trapezia, not counting the one the man is carrying. To me it's like a miracle that the man in the picture before by me carrying an object with the same shape exactly when I was at that place ready to take the picture.

Trapezia (film)



Also taken at the spot where the circus was being put away. I noticed that the ladder was directing my eyes to the image of the female figure on the right. I hoped that the man would climb the ladder and look at the female figure or interact with it in some way. After just a couple of minutes, he did exactly what I had hoped. As Cartier-Bresson said once, luck plays a part in every street photo one takes.

Damsel in Distress (film)



Another photo taken where the circus was being dismantled. There is a dynamism to this image based on the two triangles formed by the ladder in the middle and by the spatial distribution of the three men. Of course one does not notice such things at the moment one takes such pictures. As a rule, there is no time to analyze anything when one is doing street photography. One acts on instinct.

Ladder III (film)



And once more I got very lucky. I noticed that I was standing at a spot that was perfect for a photo, but I needed something to happen to make the scene more interesting, something more than just an image of static lines and shapes. Luckily, a man crossed the background carrying a frame, and the overall composition of the image is very pleasing to my eyes.

Ladder II (film)

**Where did your journey start? Please trace your early timeline.
Background, first years, school days?**

I was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1972. I was the last of four children born into a family with a humble background. My family's economic situation improved as I grew, especially because my parents' hard work allowed us, their children, to achieve more in life.



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In the end, I have to say I was lucky to be the youngest child because I was able to study a foreign language and go to university mostly with the help of my older sister, who has always supported me. I was the first one in my family to get a university degree. I remember a neighbor came to me and congratulated me after hearing I had been admitted to university. That's because the area where we lived in Rio de Janeiro was nothing like Copacabana or Ipanema, the nice tourist neighborhoods of the city, where the privileged people live (except for the ones in the favelas). The neighborhood I grew up in was a poor area and actually one of the most dangerous parts of the city.

I went to public school and to public university. Education standards were not good, so most of what I learned, I learned

on my own. I have always been very curious and have always enjoyed reading and learning. But I cannot stress enough the fact that the efforts of my parents and my siblings put me in a privileged situation where I could devote time to reading and discovering. Most of my relatives were not so lucky. I mean, I have never been rich or even high class or anything, but compared to a large part of the world population, I cannot complain.

Many years in Brazil, but much of your photography is from central Europe, and your site lists your current residence as Armenia. How did all of that happen?

I left Brazil (hopefully for good) in 2012. The chance to leave was given me when I was awarded a scholarship from Goethe Institut, where I studied German, and I had the opportunity to spend three months in Berlin, where I finished the German language course. In Berlin, I met a young Russian woman with whom I started a relationship. After our time in Berlin and many months of a virtual relationship and occasionally visiting each other in Rio and in Moscow, we decided to quit our jobs and move to Germany, where she became a student. The job I quit was my job as a civil servant, which I had for 10 years. In 2012, I also became a student at a German university. My dream was to stay in Germany because I really enjoyed life there. Germany is where I was able to photograph freely for the first time. In Rio de Janeiro, I could not do it because criminality levels are so high that people are mugged and murdered for a pair of shoes. I am not exaggerating when I say this. I rarely dared to carry a camera around while living in Brazil and that is why I didn't photograph much there.

Be that as it may, staying in Germany proved impossible because the German authorities refused to allow me to stay there as a freelancer and I didn't want to have a traditional office job, even

if I could find one. So I left Germany for Georgia, the country, and lived there until the pandemic happened. I left Georgia for Armenia, where I have been living for the last few years. The most important thing to me is to live in a safe place. Rio de Janeiro was and still is a very dangerous place to live in, and I can't even imagine myself going back to that city. I, literally, have nightmares in which I do.

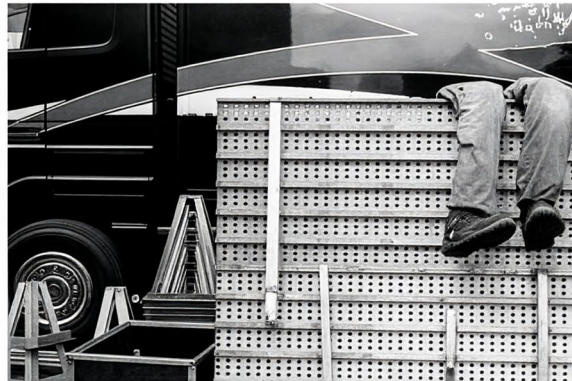
How did you come to start photography? What was the trigger?

I have had an interest in arts since I can remember. Literature had a powerful impact in terms of shaping my personality from early on. Movies were also important. I think it was in 2006, maybe 2005 or 2004, that photography became something I discovered I wanted to practice myself. I am sure I already knew about photography and was familiar with some of the work of great photographers by then, but the idea of becoming an amateur photographer only started taking shape when I bought a camera for a practical reason—I needed to take photos of something I wanted to advertise and sell or something like that. I can't remember what the circumstances were exactly. I remember buying a very early Sony Cyber-shot model. I think it had a resolution of 2.5 megapixels, if I remember correctly, with a tiny screen on the back. I remember that I took a photo of my then girlfriend, who was photogenic, and when I converted the image into sepia, I was immediately hooked. It just looked great to my eyes. That image today would probably not look so good due to its low resolution, but it did the trick back then. I suddenly became aware that photography was something I could explore in a different way, in an active way. I already had some interest in painting, but I never considered painting as a means of expression because I am not good with my hands that way. But taking that portrait of my girlfriend and converting it into a sepia image made me aware that photography was something I

could explore. It didn't require the manual dexterity that I felt I lacked for painting. I think that not many months after that I bought my first film camera.

Many self-taught photographers don't "get there." How have you gone about training yourself so successfully?

I am a very introverted person and I also enjoy researching things, so when I develop an interest in a subject I start gathering all materials I can about it. I tend to become obsessed with the things that kindle my interest and want to learn everything about them. When I started, there



were neither online resources nor instruction, so I started searching libraries and buying paper books about photography and reading more and more about it. The great trilogy of books by Ansel Adams had a great impact on me; he was one of the few great photographers who could write meaningfully about the subject.

Adams helps us perfect technique, regardless of photo genre, but who inspired your interest in street photography?

I started out trying to emulate the photography of Cartier-Bresson. I decided I would only be satisfied if I could look at my best photos and say to myself: "I think Cartier-Bresson

wouldn't find this too bad." So one can start out that way. Pick your favorite photographer, study their work and how they went about photographing. With time, you'll find what works for you and your own style will emerge naturally, because to emulate is not to imitate. In my case, it was impossible to imitate Cartier-Bresson anyway because his world doesn't exist anymore. So that's what worked for me. My advice then would be: train your eye examining great photos and start out by emulating the style of the artist or artists you admire most.

Both civilians and more than a few photographers don't understand street photography. What separates a "street photograph" from a photograph that's made in the street?

Part of the problem with the way people approach street photography is already suggested in your question. Many people, including some people who attained fame, act as if any photo taken in the street were, by definition, "street photography," and that includes totally commonplace images of people in the street. The problem is that when you look at these images, there really is nothing there, artistically speaking. There's nothing special in terms of composition. They often seem totally random to me. And when such images are produced by famous photographers, people come up with the most artificial reasons why such commonplace images are supposed to be special, when they simply are not.

If what these people who take random photos outdoors are doing is street photography, then we should call what Cartier-Bresson did something else (probably Fine Art) because what he did in his best work was on a totally different level. You can say the same about Vivian Maier's best street photos. When people appear in highly artistic street photos, they tend to be just one element of a great composition.

Just look at these two images by Vivian Maier:



The first of them is totally commonplace, while the second is a great image. The first one has a certain appeal that derives from the fact that it's a window into a world that has ceased to exist. You may also read it in terms of sociology, politics, or racism, and then it may have value in terms of photojournalism. But in terms of street photography, it's a very bad one, the composition is a mess. It is not visually striking. Now the second image is a marvel. It also mostly shows people, like the first one, but these people are elements of a composition that is full of symmetry, rhythm, light and shadow. The composition is in itself visually striking. It transcends a mere representation of people against a certain background at a certain moment in time. Nothing is commonplace about it. Clearly, street photography is not just taking photos of people outdoors.

With that, we know what a street photo is not; can you give a positive definition? A description of what it is?

It's unfortunately impossible to give a satisfactory positive definition of street photography. I could say that a successful

street photo contains both static elements and dynamic elements in a visually striking composition marked by symmetry, rhythm, light and shadow, or another similar attribute. A static element may be a building or other kind of architecture that provides a nice background. A dynamic element is more often than not a person or an animal that is either visually interesting in itself or interacts in a visually meaningful way with the static part of the image. This is important because if you only have static elements in a photo, say interesting architecture, then you will probably have an image that could be more or less easily recreated by any competent photographer. Where is the fun or the value in that? Of course that is OK if you call it architectural photography. Just don't call it street photography. Now when the image captured also contains a dynamic element, something that is there now interacting with the background, something that probably won't be there again in the same way in the future, then you have something unique and you are going somewhere.

But all this talk about static and dynamic elements is very dry and not really satisfactory as a definition. Simply capturing static and dynamic elements in an image does not in itself guarantee a successful great photo. There is something that will always remain indefinable. Photography is like music in this regard. Some images resonate with you, some don't. Some resonate with most people, but some people simply have no eye for photography, just as many people have terrible taste in music. Other people believe that photography must include social or political commentary and they tend not to care about composition. They tend not to believe in art for art's sake. Be all that as it may, the main thing to me is always the artistic value of a street photo, and this artistic value depends entirely on great composition. If the composition is poor, then why bother looking at the photo a second time?

Talk about your creativity. Where do ideas come from? How do you see what you see?



My ideas come as a product of chance and of the innumerable great photos I have discovered and admired through the years. When you dedicate a lot of time to examining great images, what you are doing is training your perception, training your eye, which increases your ability to identify photo opportunities when you are in the field. I sometimes deliberately keep an eye out for the chance to explore specific themes found in photos I admire. Here is a little-known photo by Cartier-Bresson, from Italy in 1932, that I find hilarious.



I wanted to do something similar since I saw Bresson's photo for the first time. I didn't actively search for an opportunity to take a photo like this; that's not how unstaged street photography works. But the desire to take a photo like this was always in the back of my mind, in my subconscious. Then one day I was in Tbilisi, Georgia, when suddenly the opportunity presented itself to me. I wasn't carrying my camera, so I had to take it with my smartphone.

Some say successful photography depends on "smart luck"—the combination of preparation, patience, and chance. Agreed?

Although his images are eloquent, Cartier-Bresson was not. However, one thing that he said is very true. Somebody asked him if luck plays a part in photography. And he said, "Yes, each and every time." This is totally right. Being in the right place at the right time to take a great street photo is like a miracle. So many things have to come together so that you can capture that image. And it's a thrill when you manage to do it.



It's impossible to describe the circumstances in which these magical moments arise. It's impossible to say "if I go to place X on such a day at such a time, I'll take a great street photo". Traveling to new places helps, because you are seeing everything around you for the first time and your attention is heightened, but one can travel for days in new surroundings and get nothing. Other times you take a great photo in the neighborhood where you have been living for years and everything is familiar. That's the situation in which I took the photo on the cover of this magazine. That spot is around 100 meters from where I live in Yerevan right now, a spot I go by

practically every day. Suddenly you see the place in a new light and you take a nice photo. And this indicates that there's also a mental aspect to the whole thing. Sometimes you are in sync with whatever it is and photography happens. It's a mystery.

Realizing that “it is not about the gear,” quite a few of our readers like to hear details about equipment and technique. Cameras? Post-production software? Tricks of the trade?

As to processing, I use only *Lightroom*, and I can't say I am an advanced user. I try to restrict processing to a minimum. I do that not only as a matter of principle, but also because it's not something I particularly enjoy doing. What I really enjoy is catching moments. Of course there is a contradiction in saying that I limit processing to a minimum when the first thing I do is, as a rule, is to convert the color captures from my camera into black and white. The world is not black and white after all. But I don't even have *Photoshop* installed on my computer and don't know how to use it. That's the kind of manipulation I never do. I do a lot of cropping though. If I tried to avoid cropping like Cartier-Bresson, I think that would drive me crazy.

As to cameras, I don't have a fetish for fancy, flashy, and expensive equipment. I shoot with a Nikon D5100 and a Sigma 17-50 mm F2,8 that I bought over ten years ago. Many of my photos were taken with a simple Nikon film camera though. It was a second-hand camera I bought in Germany. When the equipment question comes up, I always remember that story about the photographer who was invited to dinner. It goes more or less like this: during the dinner, the person who had prepared the meal said to him: “I just love your photos. You must have a great camera”. To which the photographer replied: “I just love your food. You must have a great stove.” I suspect this story was made up, but it makes the point

precisely. Of course I would love to have fancy equipment. Why wouldn't I want to have a Leica? It would be a great thing to have, bragging rights and all, but one works with the best one can afford.

What's next? For artists who have amassed a successful catalog, a book is the next step? Is there one in your future?

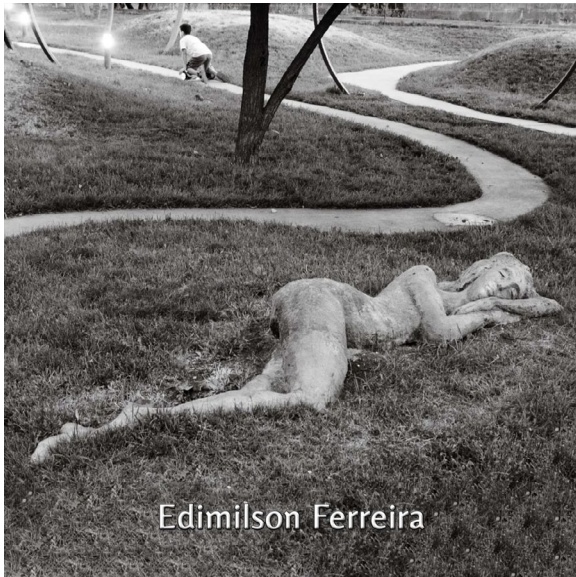
I do like the idea of writing a book about photography. I have the feeling that there is no good book about the techniques one can use and I think a good book about the subject would contain the stories behind the photos, the context in which the photos were taken. It would also contain chapters about different masters of street photography and their evolution in the art. You see, I once downloaded 600 photos by Cartier-Bresson. It's pretty obvious that his style evolved. In the beginning, he used many of the cheap tricks that every street photographer uses. especially when starting out, like relying too much on graffiti or architecture when photographing. The problem with relying too much on graffiti and architecture is that you are actually hijacking someone else's art. For example: a photo in which you see the graffiti of a revolver on a wall and a person caught in the picture while standing near or passing by the end of the barrel. This is a cheap trick. The art in such a photo should actually be attributed to the graffiti artist. The same thing applies to the use of architecture in a lot of the street photos one finds on social media. A good book would explain the process and aesthetic of street photography in terms of how the best artists developed and how the best images came about.

Thanks, Eddie. Where can we see more of your work and how do we stay in touch?

People can see most of my work on Instagram @edimilsonferr, and I have my own website (www.edimilsonferreira.com) where

I upload my photos and videos about different topics, such as the stories behind my own and others' photos and the techniques. The best way for me to share street photography tips and ideas is Substack, find me there at substack.com@edimilsonferreira.

Anyone who would like to acquire prints can order them at <https://eddieferr.pictorem.com/> or get in touch with me directly at edimilsonferreira@gmail.com. Buying prints would be the best option for anyone out there willing to support me. It's a great feeling when somebody expresses the desire to have a print of one of my photos.



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